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I have decanted a few thoughts into this article—unprofitable thoughts, I fear. But the plea made has at least done the pleader good. If time shall allow and the Editor approve, I may take some space in a future number of the REVIEW—perhaps the next—for some suggestions more helpful to the teacher in his work.

Brainerd Kellogg.

*Polytechnic Institute, Brooklyn, Jan. 20, 1893.*

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## TEACHING SHAKESPEARE.

In every English Literature course, and in every college preparatory course, one or more of Shakespeare's works appear as topics for special study. How these plays are to be taught so that the student shall be enabled to pass an examination intelligently is a question that must often occur to every conscientious teacher of English.

It is a task of no difficulty to announce to-day that to-morrow's lesson will consist of so many scenes, say, of *Julius Caesar*, and that the class will be expected to familiarize itself with the allotted portion. When to-morrow comes, however, it is no unusual experience to find that the preparation has been exceedingly superficial, and that it is a difficult matter to maintain the interest of the class. This is a lamentable state of affairs, and there is some reason for the condition, could we find it, "For this effect defective comes by cause." Teachers in English will feel the deepest satisfaction when they find a way to make their pupils as enthusiastically familiar with the story of *Othello* and *Desdemona* as with that of *Ivanhoe* and *Rebecca*; when they can arouse as much fervor over the duel between *Laertes* and *Hamlet* as over the chariot race in *Ben Hur*.

The inability to arouse in young students an interest and an appreciation of Shakespeare is due, in many instances, to mistaken conceptions about the proper methods of instruction. One cause, at least, underlying these false methods has been reached by Professor Ransome. He says, "The teaching of literature in schools is for the most part in the hands of men [?] who have been accus-

tomed to study Roman and Greek authors from the philological rather than from the literary standpoint," and the philology which is doled out to students in Shakespeare is, as Professor Winchester has written, "mighty poor philology." Fortunately, the present generation of instructors is awaking to the fact that even Virgil can be studied for something beyond the niceties of syntactical and rhetorical analysis, and that Homer can serve a higher purpose than being made the companion-piece of an exposition upon subjunctives and optatives. It is to be hoped that as our young students come under the benign influence of this new era in teaching the ancient classics they will be pervaded by a similar spirit of considering the modern classics. Then, if they enter upon the profession of teaching they will not be handicapped with a preconceived theory that the writings of Shakespeare are either a parade ground for marshalling battalions of complicated syntactical puzzles, brilliant metaphors, epigrams, allusions and rhetorical figures of all kinds, or a magnificent necropolis whence obsolete and antiquated words and expressions are to be dug, that their antecedents and personal history may be analyzed to the finest point of minute detail.

Another error which affects the teaching of the great dramatist is the idea of "cramming" matters relating directly or indirectly to the play in question. According to this plan the pupil must be tolerably familiar with all the minutiae relating to the origin of the plot, with particulars about various editions, with the most famous criticisms, native and foreign, with contemporaneous history, and with the main circumstances, authenticated and conjectured, of the poet's life. These investigations, valuable and interesting as they may be to specialists or enthusiasts, are absurdly out of place in preparatory courses and even in regular college literature courses. They belong to electives. How many school-boys and school-girls would be at a loss to tell in what plays *Falstaff* appears, and yet could tell unhesitatingly to whom Shakespeare willed his "second-best bed and furniture," and how many of those who could tell why the poet left Stratford for London, could not state the purpose underlying *Antony's* immortal funeral oration over the body of the murdered *Caesar*! Let us suppose the case of some young student who is about to read *Barnaby Rudge*. First let him prepare himself by becoming master of all extant accounts of the Gordon Riots, and follow this with a sys-

tem of readings upon the phenomena of insanity and heredity; let him then search the interesting data regarding the various editions of Dickens's works, and then read Forster's *Life of Dickens* and some collections of Dickens's Letters; thereupon, after directing him to study the greatest English, French and German criticisms upon the author's diction and place in national literature, let him parse and analyze carefully the most thrilling passages in the story, keeping a watchful eye for all rhetorical figures. The student will then have accomplished the task in a "*Shakespeareian* sense," at least, and the judgment shown in pursuing such a course will be equalled only by the interest with which he will seek to re-read the story or to undertake the herculean task of mastering another by the same author.

For what purpose are students made to study the plays of Shakespeare? To become familiar to a certain extent with the work of the poet; to reach an understanding of and familiarity with the play itself; to be able to discuss the play intelligently and appreciatively; to attain some idea of Shakespeare's power and position from *original* thought and *personal* examination. These are the ends to be gained in a preparatory course; they are to be gained most successfully by teaching the student to read Shakespeare *subjectively* so to speak, rather than *objectively*. By a course of judicious questions on the part of the instructor the pupil should be taught how to read himself into the story, to see everything projected before him, so that not a single episode which has its bearing upon the development of the plot shall escape him. Young students cannot do this alone. They need the guiding hand of experience to show them how to proceed, and when they once grasp the idea they can work independently. How many students of *Hamlet*, for instance, see anything unusual in *Bernardo's* first addressing *Francisco* at the very opening of the play? And yet there is a most subtle stroke in that breach of military discipline. How many, upon a first reading, appreciate the real force of that awful scene in *Macbeth*—for "awful" it is in the true sense of that much abused word—the "knocking at the gate," after *Duncan's* murder? Pupils generally will not appreciate these points at the outset. Questions, and plenty of them, will teach the young student how to read. By these means he will be truly educated—"drawn out." Let him find *for himself* the absurdity, for example, of the conventional representation

of *Hamlet* as a pale, weakly young student ; let him *originate* his own idea of how *Iago* should be represented ; persuade him to express *his own* theory about the character of *Brutus*. When he has been taught to trace for himself the inter-dependence of the various parts of the plot, to analyze the motives underlying the action of the different persons, above all to “originate” some thought regarding the play or the characters, then he has accomplished something. The student who is so interested that he will make his own criticisms, his own thoughtful interpretations, is the successful student. He may not know much about early editions, nor rhetorical criticism, but he will re-read the poet, while the syntactically-philologically-critically-historically crammed student will heave a sigh of relief when he reaches the closing “*Exeunt*,” and thank his stars at having finished the most tiresome of authors.

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